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ART BUCHWALD

A Pique at the Capital Spyline

The spook community in Washington is talking of nothing else but the turnabout of Soviet spy Vitaly Yurchenko. Only a few months ago he was the CIA's prize Soviet canary. Then, without warning, he turned up at the Russian compound and announced he was going home.

Forget his story about being drugged and kidnaped. The truth is that Yurchenko was not tortured but was badly handled by the CIA. It was not Vitaly's love for the motherland that drove him back to Moscow, but rather his disenchantment with the American way of life.

This is what happened. Yurchenko, while in Rome, was persuaded to defect by a CIA agent who offered the KGB officer wine, woman and song, not necessarily in that order.

"Sing to us, dear Yurchenko," the CIA man said, "and we promise you riches beyond your dreams: a safe house, \$1 million in cash, a gold American Express card and a free trip to Hawaii for two, ground transportation and gratuities not included."

Yurchenko, who always wanted to see Hawaii, accepted the offer. He was immediately flown to Langley to be debriefed and tested for AIDS. As for his million dollars, the CIA people said they would invest it for him in a good tax shelter.

Then the counterespionage boys went to work. "Sing to us,

Vitaly, sing to us the names of moles and double agents and spies who are still out in the cold." Yurchenko started to sing in a beautiful baritone that only great Soviet defectors possess.

All went well until Yurchenko demanded the safe house he was promised.

A CIA real estate agent took him out to the Virginia countryside. They drove up to a dirty, gray, weather-beaten cabin with broken windows, rotting stairs and a large hole in the roof.

"What's safe about this house?" Yurchenko said.

"The KGB would never think of looking for you here. We'll let you buy it for \$500,000."

"Why should I pay for a house?"

"We always make our defectors pay for their safe houses. The CIA is not in business for its health," replied the agent. "Look, we're not taking advantage of you because you're a dirty Commie traitor. Every house in Virginia sells for \$500,000."

Yurchenko bought the shack from the CIA and received an advance of \$150,000 to fix it up.

Unfortunately just when he got the house the way he wanted it, the KGB found out where he lived and burned it down on Halloween. Yurchenko escaped out the back window and three hours later arrived at CIA headquarters shaking. He demanded his money be returned since the house wasn't safe at all. The matter went as

high as the director of the Covert Real Estate Division, who told him that the Central Intelligence Agency had a firm policy. As long as the house was safe when the CIA sold it to a defector, the agency was not responsible for the KGB's burning it later on.

Yurchenko was hurt and confused.

The CIA put him up in a Holiday Inn and said, "Sing, Yurchenko, and you'll find a BMW in front of your door and a girl like the one in the Calvin Klein ads."

So Yurchenko sang some more. He would still be singing today if the CIA had not made one tremendous blunder. It had invested the rest of Vitaly's money in a Maryland savings and loan. When Yurchenko went to make a withdrawal, the cashier told him they had run out of money and slammed down the window in his face.

Enraged, the spy returned to Langley and confronted Bill Casey. The director said there was nothing he could do. "The CIA has no intelligence as to which savings and loan banks are solvent and which ones aren't. If you had come to me earlier I would have tipped you off on some good stocks."

That did it for Yurchenko. Since he was wiped out he decided to return to Moscow and face the music. His last words as he boarded the plane were, "I don't want to live in a country where your savings aren't insured by the FDIC."

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